
STATE OF INDIANA

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FAQs for Homestead Database (Distributed September 29, 2009)

1. *Does the DLGF expect the county's tax software vendor to populate the information in Table 1 of the [homestead verification form] with information from the county's existing data? (i.e. Our bill-print file already has the information in Part 1 and it would be used to provide the Taxpayer Name, Property Address, State parcel Number, and Legal Description.) – OR – Does the DLGF want the county to send a blank form?*

The form that is sent should be blank, to allow the taxpayer to fill the information in themselves. This is important because we, in many cases, will not have their full legal name, etc., as the law requires. This is also important because they are signing that the information on the form is true and accurate, and it would cause problems for the county if they pre-populated the information and it turned out to be incorrect.

UPDATE 1-7-10: This answer is unintentionally misleading. Part 2 thru 4 should be left blank. Part 1 can be either left blank, or pre-populated, depending on the abilities of the county and tax/billing vendor.

2. *Will a county be able to include the County Parcel Number in Part 1?*

Yes, so long as they also send the state parcel number.

3. *Item 2 on the back of the [homestead verification form] indicates the taxpayer must provide the last 5 digits of their Social Security Number (SSN) and if they don't have a SSN, then they would provide the last 5 digits of their Driver's License Number (DLN). Item 4 indicates the applicants must have both a SSN and DLN. I presume the DLGF's expectation is that a county will capture both the SSN and the DLN – if they have both. Is that an accurate presumption?*

Yes, both numbers should be submitted if they are available.

4. *There is also a place for "Other" in Part 2 of the HS-1, which I interpret from the instructions on the back of the form would be used if the property owner has neither a SSN nor a DLN. There is space in Part 4 of the [homestead verification form] for "Additional Information" about the "Other" number. Whether the property owner has a SSN, DLN, or "Other", will the DLGF expect the county to provide to the DLGF (in a data file that will presumably be sent from the county to the DLGF) the type of number(s) being provided? I want to make sure I know what data the DLGF expects a*

county to store (presumably up to 3 numbers) and also associate a description with that number (i.e. SSN, DLN, or Other). If so, how many characters will you expect the county to provide on the “Other” description?

The “other” field, since by its nature is not necessarily definable, could be any length, and so although the form only requests the last five digits, more may be provided. The database leaves this field open to accept any number provided.

- 5. Let’s presume the county has parcels 1-10 for which they send an HS-1 in 09p10 and then let’s further presume the taxpayers for parcels 2, 5, and 8 return a properly executed [homestead verification form] to the county. In 10p11 will the county be allowed to send an HS-1 for parcels 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, and 10 only? This question is based on the premise that a county’s property tax management system that creates their bill-print file can handle this “flexible functionality”.***

Yes, only one mailing needs to be sent once it’s returned, unless the information changes from year to year—for example, I submit the form for my property in 2010, but then move in 2011. I would need to re-submit the form in 2012 to verify my new homestead.

- 6. [In our system] parcels can be tied to one owner record. For instance, if Tim J. owns Parcels 2, 5, and 8, we could have the county enter Tim’s SSN, DLN, and “Other” number in Tim’s owner record, which is tied to Parcels 2, 5, and 8. Obviously this can be extremely helpful to the county so they only have to make one entry of the SSN, DLN, and “Other” but it will update multiple parcels. In this example, if the county sends a separate TS-1 in separate envelopes for Parcels 2, 5, and 8 (yes, that might happen), does the DLGF expect the Form HS-1 to be included in all 3 envelopes or would it be acceptable for a county to include the [homestead verification form] in the envelope for Parcel 2 but exclude it from Parcels 5 and 8?***

Generally a form only needs to be sent to properties where a homestead is applied. In situations where a homestead spreads over more than one parcel, the Department’s traditional guidance has been to either apply the homestead only to the main parcel, or otherwise consolidate the parcels into one. If a county decides not to apply this guidance, they would be responsible for developing a method for mailing and processing the form that gives the homeowner reasonable opportunity to verify the homestead without it being difficult or confusing to submit this information. In this case it would be reasonable to send only one homestead verification form for all three parcels, so long as the form shows all three parcel numbers to which the deduction is applied.

- 7. Will counties receive additional instructions about accepting and processing the [homestead verification form]? I’m sure there are numerous scenarios; I offer the following 2 for illustrative purposes:***

- 1. If the current deed for a parcel shows 2 owners and the [homestead verification form] is returned with only one taxpayer’s information in Table 2, will the***

county be allowed to accept the form or will they have to reject it and return it to the taxpayer for additional information?

- 2. *Will the county be required to reject the form if Part 3 does NOT include the signature, date, and phone number? (Depending on the answer to 7a, I presume the answer to this question would apply to both “Owner1” and “Owner 2”.)***

The only information that is critical for the database are the legal names; property and mailing addresses; and DLN/SSN/Other numbers. Telephone numbers are not a crucial data field, and so I wouldn't reject a form for its absence. A compliant form submission needs to have information for both spouses. If more than one owner (non spouse) is listed on the deed, only the owner who is applying for the homestead needs to provide this information. Any owners (non spouse) who are not intending to file do not need to provide info, nor do their spouses.

- 8. *When a taxpayer applies for a Homestead through the Sales Disclosure form, who is responsible for verifying the ID numbers?***

The auditor is responsible for verifying the homestead applications, including the appropriate information. When a form is entered by the taxpayer in the Sales Disclosure system, the information is sent to the homestead database on a regular basis (nightly) and is not seen by the assessor's office.

- 9. *What happens if a taxpayer doesn't supply the information on the sales disclosure form? Should it still be accepted?***

The sales disclosure form should still be processed by the assessor as a valid form. However, the auditor is then responsible for informing the taxpayer that they are responsible for providing this information in order to receive the benefits. If they do not supply it, they should not receive the benefit.

- 10. *The sales disclosure form says that the number is confidential. How am I supposed to verify it?***

In order to protect the identity of taxpayers, the Department has been very cautious to redact sensitive information whenever possible. When the form says “confidential”, that means that a value was entered in those fields online. The auditor's office can simply log into the homestead database system and double check that the numbers are available and valid.

- 11. *Does the Homestead verification form have to be sent to every taxpayer?***

The statute only requires that the form be sent to Homestead recipients. Nothing is to stop the county, if it is determined that it is most convenient, to send to every taxpayer. The Department encourages the county to make it as easy as possible on the taxpayer and to send it only to current homesteads; however, the treasurer and the auditor should work together to determine what works best in each county.

- 12. *If a taxpayer returns it one year, can we omit sending it the next year?***

Once a taxpayer verifies their information through the mailing, they do not have to verify again unless any of the information changes. The county has the choice of whether to re-send the form, or only send it to recipients who have not responded.

13. What color does the form have to be?

In order to encourage consistency statewide, the Homestead verification form should be sent on pink or rose colored paper.

14. How should the form be handled during mailing? Where will it be included – as the first, second, or third sheet?

The placement of the sheet in the mailing does not necessarily matter. The information on the pink sheet will not differ from the information on the tax statement, and just as with the comparison statement the county will have a good amount of latitude in formatting the mailing area on the form to have it meet the county's processing needs.

15. Does the form have to be pre-populated with information, or can a blank form be sent?'

The county has a great amount of leeway in formatting the reserved sections of the form to fit their mailing and processing needs. Again, the Department suggests that the county pre-populate the form and print it with the information available in the records so that taxpayers can review and correct the information on file. If cost is a concern, however, counties can consider sending unfilled forms to taxpayers as they see fit.

Please contact Tim Jorczak at 317.234.5675 or tjorczak@dlgf.in.gov with any additional questions or concerns.